

# Wild Times

A Free Publication of the Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Autumn 2004

## THE HABITAT CONNECTION: MAMMALS

### Welcome to the world of mammals



A beaver with twigs it has cut.

What is a mammal, anyway?

What makes them different from other animals? Two things:

- (1) Mammals have hair; and
- (2) They nurse their young with milk. Deer are mammals.

So are elk. So are skunks, wolves, foxes, bobcats, mice and gophers.

Birds, lizards, frogs, fish, snakes and salamanders are not mammals.

Where do mammals live? They live almost everywhere, but each kind of mammal has special needs. Each lives in a certain habitat. Your habitat is your home, your school, your city. A bighorn sheep's habitat is in the high mountains. A beaver's habitat is a stream surrounded by trees. Wide-open places with sagebrush are habitat for the antelope. Good habitat has the things mammals need: food, water, shelter and space.

When a mammal's habitat is ruined, it must move somewhere else or die.

Winter is coming. All our mammals are getting ready. Some—but not all—rodents will soon go into a deep sleep called hibernation. Bears and raccoons are fattening up and getting ready to go to their dens. Elk will be coming down out of the mountains. Bats will enter caves or buildings, or else they will fly south like birds. Wherever it goes and however it spends the winter, each kind of mammal needs the right kind of habitat all year round.



Bighorn sheep live high in the mountains.



Skunks make dens in hollow logs.



The kangaroo rat does not hibernate in winter.



# FIELD Wildlife Journal

Have you ever thought about a career? How about a job where you spend a lot of time outside with wildlife? If this sounds good, game warden might be the job for you.

If you have ever been hunting, you might have seen a game warden. Wardens check to make sure hunters have their hunting licenses. They also see if other laws are being obeyed. At times, the job can be dangerous. Sometimes the warden has to arrest criminals.

But wardens do other things too. They get to see and work with all kinds of wildlife. Wardens trap pronghorn antelope and beavers so they can be moved to new habitats. They also count deer and elk to find out how many need to be harvested. When bears come out of the woods and cause problems, wardens tranquilize them with darts. They then take the bears safely back to their habitat in the mountains. Working with mammals takes up much of the warden's time.

Mark Nelson is a game warden in Cheyenne. He patrols the county in his truck. One day, Mark found a man who, without a license, had killed a mountain lion. It was a mother lion and she had three kittens. The kittens were so young, their eyes were barely open. Mark helped rescue them. The young lions would have starved without their mother.

"These kinds of things, along with being able to dart bears and trap antelope, make my job fun and rewarding," says Mark.

Think about an exciting career as a game warden.

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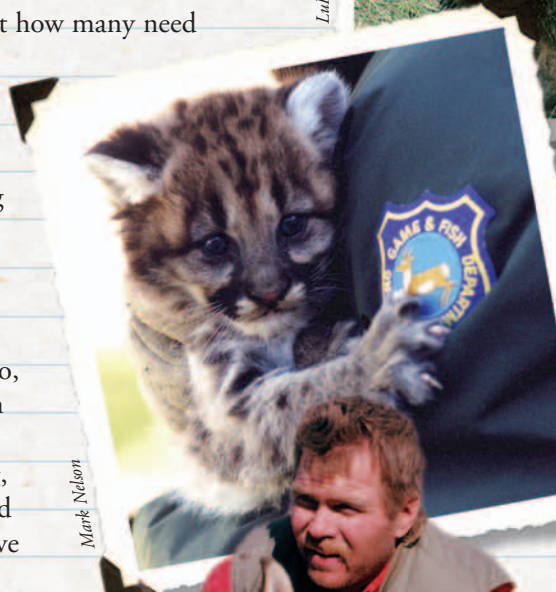
**Wardens trap pronghorn antelope and beavers so they can be moved to new habitats. They also count deer and elk to find out how many need to be harvested.**

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LuRay Parker

A black bear rests after his meal.



Mark Nelson

A newborn mountain lion

Trapping antelope is hard work.

WGFD



# WILDLIFE PROFILES

Wyoming is blessed with all kinds of mammals. We have mammals that run, mammals that jump, mammals that burrow into the ground. We even have some that fly. Our mammals are beautiful and mysterious, ferocious and comical. Study the backs of the flashcards below to learn about some of the mammals that make wild Wyoming such a special place.





# WILDLIFE PROFILES

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## BATS

Bats are our only flying mammals. Wyoming has about 15 kinds. Most are the size of a small bird.

After resting all day, bats catch mosquitoes and other insects by the hundreds at night. Bats make soft, high-pitched squeaks that bounce off flying insects. They hear these echoes with their huge ears and use them to find the insects. The echoes also prevent the bats from flying into cliff walls and tree trunks in the dark.

You might have heard the saying: Blind as a bat. Bats aren't blind, but they use their ears even more than their eyes when flying.

## MOUNTAIN LION

Mountain lions live all over Wyoming, but are seldom seen. Active mainly at night, they prefer to avoid people. Their habitat is rocky, rugged country with lots of deer—their favorite food.

A big mountain lion can weigh more than 200 pounds. Lions are very strong. They bring down their prey by jumping on it and sinking their fangs into its flesh. Lions are skillful hunters. They can move silently, melting in and out of the trees like shadows. Using their big claws, they can also climb trees.

Lions have excellent vision, hearing and sense of smell.

## GRIZZLY BEAR

This is the king of Wyoming predators. The grizzly can weigh half a ton. You can tell this bear from the smaller black bear by the big hump on its back.

Grizzlies are unbelievably strong. They can kill elk, moose, deer and black bears. With their enormous claws, they can rip up the soil and dig gophers out of underground burrows. To get grubs and other insects, they can tear up a big rotted log like it was made of cardboard.

Grizzlies don't see well but they have superb noses and live in a world of scents.

## CHIPMUNK

These nervous little mammals are easy to find around picnic areas in the mountains. They are active during the day, begging scraps of food from campers and picnickers.

The chipmunk is a cousin of the squirrel, but unlike the squirrel, it hibernates during winter. In its den, under a pile of rocks, the chipmunk curls up into a ball and falls into a deep sleep until spring.

The chipmunk has to be on the watch constantly, or it will end up as a meal. Coyotes and hawks are just two of the many predators that prey on it.



# OUR Wildlife Heritage

Do you know what the official Wyoming state mammal is? (Hint: It's also on our state flag.)

At one time, there were millions of buffalo, or bison, in our country. Vast herds grazed from Nevada to Pennsylvania. Settlers began moving west in the 1800s and railroads were built across the country. People slaughtered buffalo and left the bodies to rot. By 1900, the millions of buffalo had been reduced to only a few hundred.

Buffalo played a big role in the early history of Wyoming, especially for our earliest residents. The Indian tribes of the plains depended on buffalo—and not just for food. Indians used almost every part of the buffalo's body, even the horns, hooves, bones and internal organs.



Buffalo played a big role in the early history of Wyoming.

Most important was the hide. From this they made the clothes they wore and the tepees they lived in. They also made drums, war shields and lots of other things from the skin. When the buffalo disappeared, the Indians' way of life was changed.

The buffalo, a grass-eater, is the biggest mammal in Wyoming. A large one can weigh a ton. Although the huge buffalo herds of early America are gone, you can still see some of their descendants. Four good places to see buffalo in Wyoming are Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, the National Elk Refuge (in Jackson), and Hot Springs State Park (in Thermopolis). Take a trip and see a famous part of our living wildlife heritage.



Wyoming's state flag.





# Around Wyoming

## A DEADLY DISEASE

A sickness known as chronic wasting disease, or CWD, is making headlines in Wyoming. CWD infects some deer and elk, making them thin and sickly. Before long, they “waste” away and die. Scientists are looking for sick animals in the hills and mountains of Wyoming. They want to find out where in Wyoming these animals live and how many there are. They want to learn how CWD spreads. Maybe a cure will be found for CWD someday. But for now, there is none. No people have become sick from this illness, only deer and elk.

**A sickness known as chronic wasting disease, or CWD, is making headlines in Wyoming.**



Ron Maier

Moose like places far from people.

## FEWER MOOSE

The moose is prized by hunters. People also like to take pictures of them. The best places to see moose are Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks and the counties nearby. Moose like remote places and wilderness. They are not comfortable around people and noise. Sadly, they are sometimes hit and killed by cars when they wander out onto highways.

For some reason, there are fewer moose in Wyoming than there were years ago. Scientists are trying to find out why.

Some people think predators are killing too many young moose. Where moose live, there are plenty of bears, wolves and mountain lions. Other people think moose habitat has been damaged. The lack of rain and snow may be drying up their food plants. We all hope to find out what is happening to our moose. Wyoming wouldn't be the same without them.

**For some reason, there are fewer moose in Wyoming than there were years ago.**



Ron Maier

A group of healthy deer.



Lukay Parker

An elk grazes on grass.



# Outdoor Classroom

## MAMMAL SIGNS

You might be surprised at how many wild mammals are around, even in town. We don't see them often because many come out only at night. But they leave signs, if we know what to look for. Dens and burrows, dams across streams, claw marks or chewed bark on trees, tracks, droppings, hair—all are signs of mammals. After the first light snow this winter, go out early in the morning and look for tracks in a field. You might find the tiny trail left by a mouse, or the bigger prints of a rabbit or squirrel. Maybe you will even see footprints of a fox.

## SQUIRREL WATCHING

Fox squirrels live in many Wyoming towns. These beautiful mammals are used to being around people and are easy to watch. Find a squirrel and study how it jumps from branch to branch. Watch how it buries a nut in the grass, how it chatters and taunts when it senses danger. Some squirrels can do a tightrope walk on electric power lines, high above the street. Why do you think the squirrel has a long bushy tail? For

what different things might the squirrel use it? Write down as many reasons as you can think of. Can you find where the squirrel goes at night?



A cotton-tail rabbit and its tracks.



A red fox hunts for mice.

Fox squirrels are common in Wyoming towns.





# ► TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE ◀

## MAMMAL OR NOT?

Which of the animals pictured at right are not mammals?



(Answers: A and C)



A



B



C

## MIXED-UP MAMMALS

Unscramble the letters to spell the names of four Wyoming mammals.

KNUSK SOMOE NOCARCO ZIRGLYZ



(Answers: skunk, moose, raccoon, grizzly)

## TRUE OR FALSE?

1. T/F All mammals hibernate in winter.
2. T/F The moose is Wyoming's biggest mammal.
3. T/F Newborn mountain lions are called kittens.



(Answers: 1-False, 2-False, 3-True)



A mule deer trots through the snow.

# ► LEARNING LINKS ◀

### WEB SITES:

If you can't travel to Yellowstone National Park this year, you can visit it on the Internet. You'll find games, puzzles and fun facts about the park and its mammals at: [www.nps.gov/yell/kidstuff](http://www.nps.gov/yell/kidstuff)

### BOOKS:

The Northern Trek series (Smart Apple Media) features fine books on bison, elk, moose, bighorn sheep and red fox. All have great color photographs. Check with your local library.



Volume 3, No. 1

Fall 2004

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Wyoming Wildlife's Wild Times is published four times during the school year (October, December, February and April). Please direct inquiries and changes of address to Wild Times, Education Branch, 5400 Bishop Blvd., Cheyenne, WY 82006; (307) 777-4538.

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